



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 22, 2009

Chris Conlan (858) 694-2137

GROUND SQUIRREL TESTS POSITIVE FOR PLAGUE *Chance of Human Exposure Slight, but Precautions Should Be Taken*

County Vector Control officials announced today that blood samples collected from a ground squirrel at the Doane Valley Campground on Palomar Mountain have tested positive for plague.

"This is the first squirrel that has tested positive for plague this year in this park. Campers should avoid contact with squirrels because their fleas may carry plague," said Gary Erbeck, Director of the Department of Environmental Health. "Please don't set up your tents near squirrel burrows, do not feed the squirrels and please warn your children not to play with the squirrels."

Plague is a bacterial disease of wild rodents that can be transmitted to humans through the bite of infected fleas. Currently, there have been no locally-acquired human cases of plague reported in San Diego County. Flea populations are monitored, and control measures are taken as necessary at this campground, and others, to reduce the potential for human exposure.

Plague warning signs are posted in all areas where plague has been confirmed. Visitors, hikers and campers in rural mountain areas should look for these signs and always follow precautions to prevent contact with the fleas:

- Avoid contact ground squirrels, chipmunks, and other wild animals.
- Do not feed, touch or handle wild animals.
- Do not rest, camp or sleep near animal burrows in the ground.
- Protect pets by keeping them on a leash, use flea control, or best of all, leave pets at home.
- Contact your doctor immediately if you become ill within one week of visiting a known plague area. Symptoms include a sudden onset of fever, chills and tender swollen lymph nodes.
- Do not touch sick or dead animals; please report them to County Vector Control.

For more information about plague surveillance, call County Vector Control at (858) 694-2888 or visit www.SDVector.com.

###